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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the development of early childhood care and education in the Caribbean region since World War II. Despite the growth of private early childhood facilities throughout the region in the immediate post-war period, supply was inadequate to satisfy demand. Governments, pressured by rising social and economic problems, were to varying degrees reluctant to provide for early childhood care and education. During the 1950s and 1960s, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation were among the first international organizations to provide sustained assistance to the region in support of early child care and education. During the 1970s, in spite of increased levels of assistance from international organizations such as UNICEF and BVLF, governments were slow to invest public funds in this area. The 1980s witnessed a real turning point in the achievement of significant advances in early childhood care and education, due to the widespread adoption of national standards for care, the development of direct UNICEF assistance in many countries, and evaluative studies of programs that focused on a teacher training and parent education. (Contains 12 references.) (MDM)

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A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

*Prepared by **Rose Davies** for the*
Second Caribbean Conference on Early Childhood Education,
Barbados, April 1-5, 1997

1. INTRODUCTION

The islands of the Caribbean region reflect the colonial and linguistic heritage of four nationalities, the English, the French, the Spanish and the Dutch. The Anglophone Caribbean comprising sixteen countries is the largest group. Moving from a northwesterly to southeasterly direction, these include viz: , the Cayman Islands, the Bahama Islands, Jamaica (the largest of the group), the Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Montserrat, St. Kitts - Nevis, Dominica, St Vincent & the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Grenada, Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados. Belize to the north and Guyana to the south, although a part of the Central and South American mainlands respectively, are also included among the English-speaking conglomerate.

The Spanish -speaking countries include Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, while the French-speaking countries are Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe and the French side of St. Maarten. Dutch is the official language of the Netherland Antilles viz: the Dutch side of St Maarten, Curacao, Aruba, Bonaire and Suriname on the South -American mainland.

The historical development of the economic, social and cultural life of these countries is remarkably similar, moreso within the context of a shared colonial past. To this is owed the somewhat common evolutionary pattern of early childhood care and education in the region, traditionally characterized by a predominance of private sector involvement in service delivery, with varying degrees of programme maintenance and monitoring supports from Governments. This type of partnership approach predominates within the English- speaking group of countries, the exceptions being Barbados, Grenada and Guyana with the highest levels of government commitment and involvement at this level of the educational system. Cuba is also outstanding in the region for having developed its child care and education system to developed world standards as a consequence of its political and social policy orientations.

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2. THE POST WAR PERIOD TO 1969

During the post war period of the early twentieth century, economic and social changes worldwide increased the demand for child care and development services outside of the home. Rapid industrialization created new employment opportunities for both men and women and this led to gradual erosion of supportive family structures such as the extended family which traditionally provided for the child care needs of working family members. Organized, outside of the home, custodial child care facilities for working class parents sprang up in response to demand, and were usually established by private individuals, benevolent organizations like the Child Welfare League and institutions such as the church. In Trinidad & Tobago, the first private nursery school was opened in 1934, and in Jamaica, the first community basic school was opened in 1938.

By the mid 1950's converging factors intensified the demand for early childhood facilities to offer more than custodial child care. A proliferation of research in child development and learning in developed countries, acknowledged the benefits to later school success of planned early childhood education opportunities, especially for the underprivileged child. Post-emancipation educational reforms in the region increased provisions for higher level educational programmes and there was heightened interest among middle, and upper class parents in the benefits of preschool education as the medium for providing their children with the academic start that would ensure later benefit from the expanded educational opportunities.

International Support for ECCD

In spite of the rapid increase in number of local private early childhood facilities known by various names across the region- day care centres, creches, preschool centres, nursery schools, dame schools, basic schools-

supply was inadequate to satisfy demand. This gave rise to situations such as developed in Jamaica, where scores of preschool aged children not attending any organized programme wandered idly about while their parents were at work. The early preschool programmes were highly academic in focus. Teachers demonstrated little awareness of the qualitative differences in early childhood learning needs and appropriate pedagogical strategies. Physical facilities were often substandard and in unsafe and inappropriate locations.

Governments, pressured by rising social and economic problems, were to varying degrees reluctant to include early childhood care and education in the budgetary provisions for social services. Hence, the delivery of these services continued for the most part unmonitored by government and almost totally dominated by the local private sector. **UNICEF** and the **Bernard Van Leer Foundation (BVLF),** were among the first international funding organizations to provide sustained assistance to the region in support of child care, development and education services. UNICEF commenced assistance to the Caribbean in the early 1950's, channelling aid to countries for child survival programmes through various regional institutions. UNICEF has since continued to play a major role in heightening regional and national concern and promoting the development of early childhood education and child and family support programmes.

In 1966, The **Bernard Van Leer Foundation** in collaboration with the University of the West Indies (Jamaica campus) embarked on a project to improve the quality of early childhood education in the region. The Project for Early Childhood Education (PECE), directed by the late D.R.B Grant of the UWI Faculty of Education, aimed to expand and improve the fledgling basic school system in Jamaica through: systematic and on-going in-service training of paraprofessional teachers; development of a curriculum appropriate to the needs of the children, the school conditions and ability levels of the teachers; production of teaching/learning materials for teachers and pupils consistent with the curriculum; research to determine the impact of all project inputs on children's cognitive development.

The success of this project was of national, regional and international significance, as in 1972, the Jamaican Government accepted the model and expanded it nationally to create the present Basic School System.
Regionally, the model was extended to Dominica as the Preschool Education Project, and subsequently has been adopted or adapted by other Caribbean countries in developing their own national programmes. In 1967, arising from local discussions on the situation of young children in the Caribbean, the Government of Barbados requested UNICEF to jointly sponsor a regional conference on **"The Needs of the Young Child In the Caribbean"**. This was held in November of that year, with representation from fourteen English-speaking Caribbean countries, Suriname, the University of the West Indies, and relevant United Nations organizations.

The conference highlighted the deteriorating social and economic conditions of individual countries which jeopardized the normal healthy development of young children. These problems included among others, rural-urban and overseas outmigration of parents in search of work, leaving behind their young children in very unsatisfactory child care arrangements; high levels of malnutrition among the young; inadequate health, nutrition and day care services targeting young children; rising teenage pregnancy rates; unemployment and increasing poverty. Among the several conference recommendations to ameliorate the existing conditions affecting children- legislation, health, nutrition, day care- was one which called for "regional efforts to share tasks of various types"(Conference Report, p. 57, 1967), in view of individual countries' limited capacity to satisfactorily implement programmes.This conference proved to be the catalyst which intensified activities in advocacy, training and programme expansion in the region.

3. THE DECADE OF THE SEVENTIES

As social and economic problems worsened during the 1970's , an upsurge of research activity in the region expanded the base of empirical data on social and economic issues which could inform programme development as well as support proposals for international funding assistance. Such research provided valuable information on problems of children and their families.

e.g. health and nutrition, child care and protection, socialization of children, social services provision, family life and cultural issues. Grant (1980), extensively cites some of these studies in "Volume 1: The Literature in Retrospect", of his " Life Style Study - Children of the Lesser World in the English-Speaking Caribbean", a series of monographs. This five volume series was developed from studies commissioned by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, in preparation for the International Year of the Child, 1980.

The nature of the social problems prevalent in the region is captured below in the listed percentage ranges across English-speaking Caribbean countries, for selected social indicators.:

Social Indicators	% Ranges
Single female headed households	35 - 50
Illegitimacy Rates among 15-19 yr olds	60 - 80
Unemployment -general	14 - 25
Unemployment- among women	50 - 60
Child malnutrition- mild-severe	6 - 40
Day care/preschool coverage	6 - 25

Source: Davies, R. Report "Unicef in the Eastern Caribbean", Kingston, Jamaica, 1986
Grant, DRB. "The Literature in Retrospect"- Vol. 1, Life Style Study, UWI, Jam. ,1980

In spite of increased levels of assistance from UNICEF, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, the Canadian Save the Children Fund and other funding organizations, to improve the status of children and children's services, individual governments during this period, were slow to invest further public funds towards increasing and improving provisions for early childhood care and education. Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana and Montserrat moved ahead of other countries in providing some government support for programmes. Some governments offered minimal support while others such as St Vincent and the British Virgin Islands, had no government involvement in early childhood programmes. The private sector was urged to continue in the lead role of service providers.

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Regional and subregional training activities for early childhood practitioners were executed by institutions such as The Regional Preschool Child Development Centre (RPCDC - renamed in 1986, The Caribbean Child Development Centre, CCDC), established by UNICEF at UWI- Jamaica in 1972, in response to the recommendations of the 1967 Barbados Conference. Servol in Trinidad and Cansave Child Welfare Centre in St. Vincent also provided subregional training for countries in the eastern Caribbean. These regional activities increased co-operation among countries in the sharing and development of resources and expertise to benefit national programmes. Some of the positive developments/activities in early childhood care and education during the 1970's include:

1970 - Jamaica - Study on " Living Conditions of Basic School Children", by Grant, influences the development of appropriate experiences for disadvantaged children in basic schools; findings applicable regionally

Trinidad - Launch of first government preschool project, assisted by BVLF, at La Pastora Community Centre; led to establishment of 15 such centres by 1993

1972 - Jamaica - Government expands Basic School system islandwide; establishes Early Childhood Unit within the Ministry of Education

- Establishment of Regional Preschool Child Development Centre,at UWI Jamaica campus- to support regional activities in early childhood care and development through training, research, advocacy and development of innovative models of service delivery, and curriculum support materials

1973 - Trinidad - Servol establishes first preschool centre in Lavantille

1974 - Trinidad - Government establishes Pre school Unit in the Ministry of Education

Belize - Christian Social Council forms Committee for the Promotion of Early Childhood Education

1975 - Jamaica - Government launches National Day Care Programme

1976 - Grenada - Government amends Education Act to include responsiblity for early childhood care and education programmes

1977 - Jamaica - UWI offers B.Ed in early childhood education for the first time, with assistance of BVLF and the EEC.

1978 - Antigua - Establishment of Sir Luther Wynter Child Development Centre, a model preschool programme and training centre run by the University Centre.

1979 - Belize - Establishment of Preschool Education Unit in the Ministry of Education.

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4. THE 1980'S TO THE PRESENT

The 1980's marked the real turning point in achievement of significant advances in early childhood care and education in the region. Three factors contributed to this forward trend:

a) The designation of 1980 as the International Year of the Child (IYC), sparked a flurry of child-focused activities in individual countries. Local Committees were set up to develop proposals and plans for achieving the IYC objectives. Many regional governments recognized the need for regulations regarding the care and welfare of the preschool child, hence the development of minimum operational standards was highlighted during that year. Most countries drafted standards, but since then legislative action has been slow in coming.

b) The established pattern of UNICEF assistance to countries shifted from sourcing through regional institutions, to direct country assistance, due to the ineffectiveness of the former arrangement in coping with the dimensions and pace of individual countries' programme development thrusts . Between 1979 and 1981, the following governments signed their first direct Programmes of Co-operation with UNICEF: Antigua & Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts-Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent. Several new agreements with these and other countries in the region have been signed since.

c.) Evaluative studies of selected institutions and programmes highlighted the main problems affecting early childhood care and development provision in the region and made recommendations for the way forward. The GLY Report (Grant, Lusan, Yorke, 1979), the "Review/Evaluation Report of the Selected Services for Children Programme" (Ying, 1983), the SPRINGER Report (Springer, 1984), the "Review/ Evaluation Report on UNICEF in the Eastern Caribbean" (Davies, 1986), are mentioned in this regard.

Aspects of Programmes Targetted for Improvement

The direct funding approach had immediate benefits as countries embarked on **refurbishing and building day care and preschool facilities**; increased supplies of furniture, outdoor play equipment, toys and other learning materials, available through UNIPAC (the supplies arm of UNICEF) and other sources. There has been since then a notable increase in the number of early childhood programmes in most countries and logically, of **enrolment and access**.

The data below provide evidence of this expansion:

Country	No. Progs.in 1980	No. Progs. in 1990
Antigua-Barbuda	32	50
Belize	24	81 (1994 data)
Dominica	54	66
Grenada	87 *	121*
Jamaica	1500	2000 (1993 data)
Montserrat	-	15
St Lucia	45	167
St . Kitts	23	42
St. Vincent	37	71
Trinidad	50 +	148+

+ (public centres only)
*includes infant departments of primary schools

Source: Davies, R. - "UNICEF in the Eastern Caribbean", Kingston, Jamaica,1986
" " - " Caribbean Journal of Education", Vol 17. No 2, Sep. 1995
World Bank - " The Trinidad & Tobago Early Childhood Survey", 1995

Besides the emphasis on improving physical facilities and expanding enrolment, there were other aspects of programme delivery which attracted attention. **Parent education** activities developed momentum and have continued in that trend to the present time. The focus of such programmes was to increase the awareness and understanding of parents regarding the

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psychological and other aspects of childhood development and also to increase their knowledge and appreciation for the content emphases and methodological approaches appropriate for early childhood programmes. Although countries in the region have experienced varying degrees of success, parent education efforts have continued to be boosted by the contribution of many local and regional organizations. Some of the better known include UNICEF, BVLF, UNFPA, Save the Children Fund, SERVOL, CCDC, PAREDOS, among others. Some governments now officially support a national strategy for parent education, eg. the Ministry of Education based Coalition for Better Parenting in Jamaica. Parenting Partners (an association of Jamaican organizations dedicated to improving parenting skills), has made a very important contribution to the advancement of parenting education by developing and publishing in 1994, a two volume manual, " Pathways to Parenting- A Caribbean Approach". The manual offers a step by step training course for parent group facilitators and an accompanying comprehensive facilitator's guide. It is presently used widely throughout the region.

The findings of the evaluative studies previously mentioned pointed to a need for renewed focus on **teacher training,** to better enable teachers at all levels to acquire and demonstrate skills appropriate for effective teaching and guiding of children at the early childhood stage. A more systematic approach to teacher/ caregiver training developed during this period and has gradually become, with the continued support of interternational organizations such as UNICEF, BVLF, Save the Children Fund, and more recently the World Bank, a clear area of government commitment in most countries.

It has been possible through such assistance to expand the types and levels of training programmes offered since the mid-1980's. In addition to regular in-service training for preschool teachers at the para and semi-professional levels, certificate, diploma and degree level programmes in early childhood education are now provided within the region.(These are selectively offered at Teachers' Colleges and at UWI in Jamaica and Trinidad). The BVLF has supported innovative training models such as the Jamaica -based "North

Coast Project" (1987 - 1993) and the five summers, part time bachelor of education degree programme at UWI(1985 - 1992). In some countries, the training of caregivers continues to be less organized and systematic than that provided for preschool teachers. The RPCDC (now CCDC) , Servol and Vinsave Training Centre must be credited for their outstanding contribution to the training of hundreds of early childhood practitioners in the region.

In the 1980's, much interest was shown by individual countries, in **developing new, or improving existing curricula** for children's as well as teacher training programmes. The concern was for better quality preschool experiences for children. In Jamaica for instance the multifaceted Program for Advancement of Childhood Education(PACE), was launched by government in 1987 to improve the working conditions of basic school teachers and the learning environment in basic schools. In that year also, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago officially invited Servol to expand its training model islandwide as the national training programme. During this period, Servol's "Spices" curriculum for 3-5 year olds, Jamaica's " Readiness" curriculum for 3-5 year olds and St. Lucia's "Pre school Curriculum Manual" all came into being and have been used nationally in preschool programmes since. The RPCDC, through annual regional workshops for preschool programme co-ordinators , spearheaded a move towards regional curriculum standardization for the training of early childhood caregivers/teachers. This collective action resulted in the production of a six volume " Manual for the Training of Early Childhood Educators in the Caribbean", between 1984 and 1985 . This series, although currently in need of updating, is still used as principal training resource material in a number of countries.

Advocacy is another programme related area that grew steadily stronger during this period. The heightened interest in early childhood care and education generated during the International Year of the Child, was kept alive in individual countries in various ways, e.g. designating a special "early childhood" week or month each year for public attention to early childhood issues and happenings; formation of various local associations of day care providers and preschool teachers, with an agenda to maintain public attention on issues relevant to early childhood care and education. Other

more recent international developments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1990 World Summit on Children have provided further motivation for advocacy groups to intensify their efforts towards achievement of desired goals.

Commiting Governments to Action

Governments in the region are becoming more responsive to local and international pressure to invest more resources in early childhood care and education. Most are signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit goals. Since the advent of the 1990's, there has been growing concern for issues such as programme quality, appropriateness, affordability and sustainability, in the face of diminishing external resources. Of equal concern has been the inequitable access to programmes for the rural child, and more effective targetting of poor children. Different cost - effective models are being tried eg. the BVLF roving caregiver model in Jamaica, homevisiting and home based nursery models throughout the region, all aimed at reaching poor children, especially in low income and rural areas.

The dilemma regional governments now face is that in spite of the will to support improvement and extension of early childhood care and development programmes, there are limited resources from which to make increased financial commitments. Allocations for early childhood care and education still remain minute compared to other levels of the education system for most countries. In some instances, the percentage allocation to this programme level is actually declining. Some interest is being shown in integrated programming approaches such as have been tried successfully in Latin America and other regions. This approach encourages intersectoral co-operation in ensuring that various services for the child are offered from the base of an early childhood programme. This approach has been shown in Colombia and England, for example, to be more cost effective than the traditional approach.

In the search for solutions, governments in the region will be encouraged to examine these integrated options for providing affordable and sustainable

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quality care for children. In this regard, there will be need for greater networking of governments in the region among each other as well as with countries outside of the region, in order to facilitate learning from shared experiences. Servol has already set precedence for such intra-regional networking through the annual meetings held up until recently in Trinidad with support from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation. The value of such annual meetings to regional networking must be underscored, and Caribbean governments should now rise to the challenge of collectively supporting the resumption of these regional assemblies.

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